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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Rivers Honored at U.S. Expense

By Drew Pearson

Seldom have so many top brass flown in so many Government planes to pay tribute to a congressional tyrant—all at the taxpayers' expense—as flew to Charleston, S.C., the other day.

Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze flew a plush C-140 jet transport, carrying a load of admirals.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance flew in another C-140 carrying Secretary of the Army Stephen Ailes, Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown and a dazzling array of generals—again at the taxpayers' expense.

The Defense Department also furnished an older C-121 Constellation to fly to Charleston. This was not quite so plush, but it was only to fly Congressmen. Adm. William Raborn, now Chief of Central Intelligence, also made the trip to Charleston.

The reason for this pilgrimage was not to commemorate some of the courageous battles fought there by the North or South during the Civil War, but to dedicate a monument to Rep. Mendel Rivers (D-S.C.).

Despite this, the top brass of the Pentagon flew to Charleston to participate in a ceremony in which Rivers took his place in life-size bronze alongside Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant de Beauregard, heroic Southern defender of Charleston.

Rushing History

The great heroes of the Civil War, Lee, Beauregard, Stonewall Jackson, had to await death before they were commemorated by grateful countrymen. But not the Congressmen from Charleston. Grateful businessmen who have benefited from the military bases Rivers has brought to the area, decided to rush history, and erect a noble bust of Rivers, mounted atop a solid, 7-foot granite shaft on what was once called Route 52.

Route 52 is now called Rivers Avenue.

Mrs. Rivers cut the ribbon, the Citadel band struck up a martial air, the glittering array of admirals and generals stood bravely in a deluge of rain, while Rep. Eddie Hebert, New Orleans Democrat who has urged Rivers to battle against Secretary of Defense McNamara, delivered the main eulogy. Eddie noted that never before had he seen so many top Defense officials gathered in one place, but did

not mention the fact that they had come at the taxpayers' expense, nor why they had come.

They came not because of any deep love for Rivers but rather because they fear him. Rivers is powerful. He is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, a position which he acquired only because of the accident of being elected from a safe congressional district and sitting around until other Congressmen retired, were defeated or died.

Thus, simply by waiting, and thanks to the rule of seniority, he became the dispenser of political power over the Navy, the Army, the Air Force and the Marines. The man whom officers did not respect was put in a position where they must respect him.

As a result the brass hats go much further than respecting Rivers.

Now they kowtow to him.

Reciprocity Pays

And it has paid off. It has paid off for them, it has paid off for Rivers, and it has paid off for Charleston businessmen. As to whether it has paid off for the rest of the Nation or for other naval bases ranging from Portsmouth, N.H., which is being curtailed, to Brooklyn, whose Navy Yard is being closed, or to Boston, whose Navy Yard

may be closed, is another matter.

In previous, Republican administrations, the Charleston Navy Yard was on the list to be closed. But not since Mendel Rivers became chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

From this position of power, Rivers has thumbed his nose both at Secretary McNamara and at President Johnson. He made mincemeat out of McNamara's move to curtail the cushy reserve duty for congressmen, kicked McNamara's plan to amalgamate the reserves with the National Guard into a cocked hat and told President Johnson to go jump into Charleston Bay when LBJ tried to hold the military pay raise down to the same level as the civilian pay raise. Instead, Rivers rammed through a 10-per-cent pay boost for the military, while civilians are getting around 3 per cent.

So when it came to dedicating his monument, they came through nobly for him.

The only Pentagon official who did not come through for Rivers was McNamara. He kept his dignity, refused to fly to Charleston to listen as Rep. Rivers, his flowing white hair dampened by rain, rose and told the assembled brass:

"One does not expect in public life to see his name engraved in stone. That usually occurs after he is gone."

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